

**A Parent Guide to
Child Sexual Abuse Prevention**



**YWCA Patterson & McDaniel Family Center
2055 Army Trail Rd. Suite 140
Addison, IL 60101
630.790.6600
Rape Crisis Hotline 888.293.2080
www.ywcachicago.org**

Link To Parent Evaluation



Illinois law and mandates

Erin's Law, or Illinois Public Act 096-1524 – Child Sexual Abuse

In Illinois, Erin's Law requires that all public schools implement child-focused sexual abuse prevention education that:

- Teaches students in grades pre-K through 5th grade age-appropriate information about how to recognize child sexual abuse and tell a trusted adult
- Requires school personnel to be informed about child sexual abuse
- Provides parents and guardians with information on the warning signs of child sexual abuse, plus any needed assistance, referrals or resources to support victims and their families

Illinois Public Act 101-0579 – Sex Education Consent Instruction

Amends the School Code. With regard to a sex education course, provides that course material and instruction in grades 6 through 12 must include an age-appropriate discussion on the meaning of consent.

Illinois Public Act 098-0190 – Teen Dating Violence

Requires educational institutions in Illinois to adopt a policy that states that teen dating violence is unacceptable and prohibited; incorporate education about teen dating violence for students in grades 7-12 and school employees.

Illinois Public Act 096-1087 – Sexting

A minor shall not distribute or disseminate an indecent visual depiction of another minor through the use of a computer or electronic communication device.

defining child abuse

Child abuse

The physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, or exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment:

- Of a child under the age of 18
- By a person who is responsible for the child's welfare
- Under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened

Four types of child abuse

1. Child physical abuse

A wide range of behaviors that physically injure or harm a child's body. Some behaviors include burning, punching, shaking, kicking and throwing a child.

2. Child neglect

Failure to provide nutrition, clothing, shelter, supervision or medical care for a child. Neglect is different from poverty.

3. Child sexual assault

Any forced, exploitive or coercive sexual contact or experience with a child. Child sexual assault includes:

- Molestation
- Rape
- Incest
- Voyeurism
- Exhibitionism
- Pornography
- Forced prostitution
- Sexual harassment

4. Emotional abuse

A pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development and positive sense of self.

Emotional abuse includes the presence of a pattern of denigrating language and/or behavior directed at the child, including:

- Profanity
- Belittling
- Criticism
- Rejection
- Threats

Emotional abuse also includes the absence of a pattern of supporting language and/or behaviors directed at a child, including:

- Pride in the child
- Praise
- Expressions of love and concern

myths and facts about child abuse

Myth: Child abuse is a rare occurrence.

Fact: Statistics indicate that child abuse and neglect occur frequently.

- Child abuse and neglect are common. At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year, and this is likely an underestimate. In 2018, nearly 1,770 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States.
- A child tells an average of seven people before they are helped.

Myth: Abused and neglected children almost always come from poor, minority, and/or inner-city families.

Fact: Child abuse occurs within every neighborhood and school community across the country. However, the Centers for Disease Control does state that children living in poverty experience more abuse and neglect due to lack of available resources.

Myth: Sexual assault only happens to girls.

Fact: We may not know the full extent of sexual assault against boys because of their tendency not to report. Current research, however, estimates that one of three to four girls and one of four to six boys will be sexually assaulted before their eighteenth birthday.

Unfortunately, statistics don't often capture the prevalence of abuse of children who identify within the LGBT community. Estimates are as high as 2 in 5.

Myth: Most children are sexually assaulted by a stranger.

Fact: It is estimated that 85% of all child sexual assaults are perpetrated by an adult known and trusted by the child. Only a small percentage of offenders fit the stereotype of a "stranger."

Myth: Child abusers are easy to identify.

Fact: Child abusers cannot be easily distinguished from other people. They usually are not adults with mental illness. In fact, many offenders are upstanding community citizens.

Myth: Most children who are abused do something to cause the abuse.

Fact: The child is always the victim. The responsibility for the abuse lies solely with the adult. In the case of child sexual abuse, many offenders will attempt to shift the blame for their actions by accusing the child of being “seductive” or “promiscuous.”

Myth: Only men sexually abuse children.

Fact: Studies of female offenders are relatively rare, at least in part because most known sex offenders are male. Females comprise only 1.2% of arrests for rape and 8.0% of arrests for all other sex offenses.

Myth: Rape only happens to women.

Fact: 1 in 3 female rape victims experienced it for the first time between 11-17 years old and 1 in 8 reported that it occurred before age 10. Nearly 1 in 4 male rape victims experienced it for the first time between 11-17 years old and about 1 in 4 reported that it occurred before age 10.

prevention of abuse: the theory of vulnerability

Prosecution

Prosecution rates for abuse are unusually low. Few abusers are convicted since most abuses are never reported; abusers are seldom caught, and it is difficult to obtain enough evidence for a conviction. Relying on prosecution for “prevention” of abuse means that abuse will never be eliminated or even seriously curtailed.

The relationship the child has to the perpetrator may create barriers to disclosure. Over 90% of the time, victims of sexual abuse are abused by someone they know and trust. This is a very confusing dynamic for children; the people who tend to abuse them are people that should be caring for them; people they are taught to respect; people who should not hurt them. Because of this, telling can be very complicated. Younger children may be confused, possibly believing that what the perpetrator is doing is normal. Oftentimes victims still care for the person who is abusing them, and may be concerned that telling will lead to the perpetrator getting in trouble.

Fear of consequences not only for the perpetrator, but for the victims themselves and their families, can also make immediate disclosure difficult. Perpetrators may make threats to victims about hurting them or people they care about. Because of the stigmas associated with sex, victims also may believe they are at fault, that no one will believe them if they tell, or that they are impure and dirty. These ideas lead to victims feeling shameful and embarrassed about what happened, and may fear repercussions from parents or family members if they tell.

Avoidance

Advocating avoidance strategies, the other traditional form of prevention, suggests that individuals can control rape by controlling their own behavior. From an early age, girls are taught never to go out alone, never to walk after dark, never to talk to strangers; women are told never to cross dark parking lots, never to open their doors to strangers, and to invest in lights and locks to deter abusers. These avoidance techniques are based on myths about how rape happens. It also assumes rape can only happen to women and girls. Locks do not prevent friends whom you invite into your home from abusing. Looking into the back seat of your car before you get in will not stop your date from abusing you. Never hitchhiking does not protect a person from their partner or boss. Indeed, since most people are abused by someone they know, avoidance techniques are poor strategies against abuse.

Effective Prevention: Reduction of Vulnerability

We can reduce children's vulnerability to abuse by:

- Providing children and their adult community with information and resources that empower them to identify and prevent abuse
- Reducing children's powerlessness and dependency by teaching them assertiveness.
- Increasing children's sources of support and assistance with peer support and a network of trusted adults.

clues to possible victimization

Sometimes children don't tell us they are in crisis, they show us. A change in children's behavior could be due to the stress of being abused. These changes in behavior can alert adults to their problem.

Abuse and neglect can also sometimes leave physical marks on a child's body that adults can observe. Knowing both the physical and behavioral clues to abuse can help adults intervene on behalf of children.

Keep in mind that some clues can be normal behaviors for a given child at a given time. Therefore, it is important to be aware of new behaviors, extreme behavior, or combinations of the following characteristics.

Abused children cannot be identified by racial, ethnic, religious or socioeconomic class. Abuse crosses all of these lines.

Abused children are often:

- Fearful of interpersonal relationship or overly compliant
- Withdrawn or aggressive, hyperactive
- Constantly irritable or listless, detached
- Affectionless or overly affectionate (misconstrued as seductive)

Physical symptoms:

- Bruises, burns, scars, welts, broken bones, continuing or inexplicable injuries
- Urinary infections (particularly in young children)
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Chronic ailments, stomach-aches, vomiting, eating disorders
- Vaginal or anal sores, bleeding, or itching

Activity and habit clues:

- Nightmares
- Inappropriate masturbation
- Fear of going home or to some other location

- Fear of being with a particular person
- Running away
- Delinquency
- Lying
- Engaging in sex work

Age-inappropriate behavior:

- Alcohol/substance abuse
- Age-inappropriate sexual activity or awareness
- Assaulting younger children
- Takes on adult responsibilities
- Thumb sucking
- Promiscuity
- Bed wetting

Educational concerns:

- Extreme curiosity, imagination
- Inability to concentrate
- Sleeping in class
- Academic failure

Emotional indicators:

- Depression
- Phobias, fear of darkness, public restrooms, etc.
- Lack of spontaneity, creativity
- Self-inflicted injuries
- Injuring/killing animals
- Excessive fearfulness
- Chronic ailments

responding to a child in distress

The four steps of problem solving:

1. Identify the problem
 - An older kid stole my bike
 - The babysitter made me do things I don't like.
2. Examine possible solutions
 - Give up my bike and buy a new one, confront the bully with a friend and say "No!" or tell my mom or dad or a teacher.
 - Try to tell the babysitter "no" or tell a trusted adult.
3. Evaluate each alternative
 - I'd be afraid that I'd get hurt by the bully; a friend would help me feel stronger.
 - If I told a trusted adult they will talk to the babysitter or find a different babysitter.
4. Prepare a realistic plan of action
 - I'm going to tell the bully to give me my bike back and take a friend with me.
 - I want to talk to my trusted adult or talk to the babysitter with my trusted adult.
 - Let the child know they have a right to be safe.

Handling a disclosure of abuse from a child

Believe what they are telling you

- Focus on feelings more than specifics about the situation
- Try not to question what they are telling you. Asking “why” questions can make a child feel like it is their fault.
- Use open-ended questions to gather only the information you need to report the incident. Who, what, where, when? Then focus on feelings.

Assure the child it is not their fault

- Thank them for telling you.
- Let them know how much courage it takes to come forward and tell someone.

Tell them what action you will be taking in a very gentle, caring way

- Be honest and upfront about what may happen.
- Let them know you are there to support them.
- Never make promises to a child about what the outcome will be, we have no idea how this situation will work out.

Call Department of Children and Family Services if the abuser is a caretaker in the child's life 1-800-25A-BUSE or 1-800-252-2873

victims with disabilities

Statistics:

- Individuals with disabilities are at least twice as likely to be victims of violent victimization as people without disabilities.
- In a 2013 study, nearly 13% of children who were abused or neglected also had a disability.
- Almost 95% of individuals with a disability, who were victims of violent crime, could identify their perpetrator. 40% were victimized by an acquaintance, 30% were victimized by a stranger, and 15% were victimized by an intimate partner.

Vulnerabilities

Isolation within a community, who rely on caregivers for personal care, and have limited transportation options, can create unsafe situations for people with disabilities. Perpetrators may perceive people with disabilities as easy targets because of societal stereotypes and extremely low rates of prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against people with disabilities. Finally, the severe underreporting of these crimes serves to further compound the overall inability of the system to address this problem.

handling disclosures from a person with a disability

- Speak directly to the person, not the caregiver.
- Use the same calming techniques for a person with a disability that you would use with anyone else, but be prepared to take more time.
- Limit distractions.
 - *This is relevant for a person who is deaf and is trying to lip read or a person with mental disabilities who may have short attention spans and be highly distractible.*
- Find a quiet location where the person feels safe and comfortable.
- Speak in a friendly, non-authoritative way.
 - *This is relevant for a person who is blind and cannot readily “read” this situation and for a person with mental disabilities who may be confused and may not understand what is happening.*
- Introduce others who are present.
- Minimize differences in size.
 - When speaking to a person in a wheelchair, sit down so you are at eye level.
- Let the person know that it is okay to say, “I don’t know” or “I don’t remember.”
- Give person as much time as needed to respond to your questions.

Source: University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Disability and Human Development.

Grooming

There are a number of specific techniques or ***grooming behaviors*** that offenders use to mask their behavior prior to the abuse, as well as during and after the abuse. Many deliberately establish themselves as the kind of person you wouldn't suspect to be a sex offender because they are "too nice" or an upstanding person in the community who helps people. Trust your gut instinct and then act on it. It is also important to listen for statements or questions from your child that would support your suspicions, and to encourage your child to tell you more about the time they spend with the person.

- Insists on hugging/tickling/wrestling with child, even if the child has said "stop."
- Normalizing touches that feel uncomfortable for the child or teen.
- May establish a trusting relationship with the family and friends of a child, in order to have access to the child alone.
- Spends most of their spare time with children.
- Offers special attention to children like gifts and money to manipulate child into keeping the abuse a secret.
- Encourages unhealthy behaviors.
- Destroys the child's trust in others.
- Undermines the way others view the child.

reporting: rights and responsibilities

In the state of Illinois, school personnel are required to report suspected child abuse and neglect. The following information will assist you in understanding this responsibility.

- School personnel are required to report suspected abuse immediately. You do not need to have proof or evidence of abuse. If you have “reason to believe” a child is being abuse or neglected you are mandated to report.
- A report may be made by phone or by correspondence to the Department of Children and Family Services agency in Springfield.
 - Note: If your call is not an emergency, you do have the option to submit your report online through the online reporting system at <https://dcfsonlinereporting.dcf.illinois.gov/>.
- School personnel should provide the names of the child and the parent(s), the age of the child, and the reason(s) for suspecting abuse or neglect. If you know the name of the person you suspect is abusing the child, this information should also be provided.
- Reporters of child abuse and neglect are immune from any civil or criminal liability.
- All child abuse and neglect report and investigations are confidential, including the identity of the person making the report. The reporter’s name cannot be released without his or her written consent.
- Any person required to report suspected child abuse or neglect who willfully fails to report such abuse or neglect shall be guilty of a Class A misdemeanor for a first violation and a Class 4 felony for a second or subsequent violation. [325 ILCS 5/4.02]
- A person does not need to be required by law to make a report. If any person suspects a child to be abused or neglected, they may contact the Department of Children and Family Services.

suggested activities for parents & teachers

1. Discuss children's rights, including the rights not to be touched in ways that makes a child feel unsafe or uncomfortable, the right to say no, and the right to get help.
2. Let your children know that you believe in their ability to stay safe and that you will always be there to help.
3. Play the "what if" game with your children. For example, "What if you went home today and there was no adult to greet you? What would you do? Where would you go?" Make each situation age appropriate.
 - For older students, "What if your date becomes physically, verbally, or sexually abusive?" What would you do? Who would you tell?
 - Answer children's questions about nightmares, television programs, real-life tragedies and "what-if's" positively and creatively without ridiculing their feelings or denying reality
4. Encourage children to help other children.
5. Discuss "good" and "bad" secrets, "safe" and "unsafe" touching and how to tell the difference.
6. Discuss consent and setting boundaries with your child at an early age.
7. Educate children about different types of force and manipulation that offenders may use such as: bribes, extortion, guilt, threats physical and authority.
8. Teach children about the importance of listening to their instincts.
9. Incorporate the words "safe, strong, and free" into your family's vocabulary.
10. Engage in family reading on personal safety, consent, boundaries and what do if they feel unsafe.
11. Encourage discussions around feelings (good, bad, scary, happy, etc.)
12. Continue to talk about safe/trusted people. Encourage them to create their own list of trusted adults.

for the community

1. Know your options if you witness child abuse or neglect.
2. When helping a child you don't know well, keep in mind the valuable information they have been given about strangers:
 - Stay a safe distance from the child
 - Don't touch the child
 - Let them know you will help them by calling someone they trust.
 - Watch the child's body language
4. Learn more about child abuse and its effects. See what you can do to help in your community by visiting the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago Website at:
<https://ywcachicago.org/our-work/sexual-violence-support-services/education-training/>

National and Local Resources

Department of Children and Family Services

1-800-252-2873 (1-800-25-ABUSE)

<https://www2.illinois.gov/dcfs/Pages/default.aspx>

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago - Patterson & McDaniel Family Center

2055 Army Trail Rd. – Suite 140

Addison, IL 60101

Phone: 630-790-6600

24-hour crisis hotline: 888-293-2080

Crisis Text Line: 888-293-2080 (Monday-Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm)

<https://ywcachicago.org/>

DuPage County Health Department

111 N. County Farm Rd.

Wheaton, IL 60187

Phone: 630-682-7400

www.dupagehealth.org

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

Nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization.

National Hotline - 1-800-656-HOPE/ 1-800-656-4673

www.rainn.org

Parent Help Line

1-855-427-2736- Mon-Sun 8a.m.-8p.m.

<https://www.nationalparenthelpline.org/>

U.S. Department of Justice: Americans with Disabilities Act

Phone: 800-514-0301

TTY line: 800-514-0383

<https://www.ada.gov/>

Family Resource Center on Disabilities

20 E. Jackson Blvd., Rm. 300

Chicago, IL 60604

Phone: 312-939-3513 / Toll-free at 800-952-4199

<https://frcd.org/>

DuPage Crisis line: 630-627-1700

Individuals experiencing a crisis can contact Crisis Services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

<https://www.dupagehealth.org/183/Crisis-Services>

National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

24-hour hotline with resources to aid in every child abuse situation. All calls are confidential.

Eating Disorder Hotline: 800-931-2237

The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) is the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders.

Helpline phone hours are Monday-Thursday 11AM-9PM ET & Friday 11AM-5PM.

Helpline chat hours are Monday-Thursday 9AM-9PM ET & Friday 9AM-5PM.

For 24/7 crisis support, text 'NEDA' to 741741

www.nationaleatingdisorder.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

National Runaway Safe line 1-800-RUN-AWAY (1-800-786-2929)

The mission of the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) is to keep America's runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.

DuPage Family Shelter Service Metropolitan Family Services

24 Hour Hotline - 630-469-5650

Domestic Violence Services

<https://www.metrofamily.org/FSSofMFSD/>

Hamdard Center A community health **center** providing healthcare and support services for diverse communities in the Chicagoland area facing financial and domestic challenges.

630-835-1430

<https://www.hamdardcenter.org/>

Websites

Kids Health

We aim to give families the tools and confidence to make the best health choices.

www.kidshealth.org

Pandora's Project

Non-profit organization dedicated to providing support, and resources to survivors of rape and sexual abuse and their friends and family.

www.pandys.org

Love Is Respect

love is respect is the national resource to disrupt and prevent unhealthy relationships and intimate partner violence by empowering young people through inclusive and equitable education, support, and resources.

<https://www.loveisrespect.org/>

Self-Injury: S.A.F.E. Alternatives:

At S.A.F.E., tries to create a "culture of safety" in which the injurer comes to realize that self-injury destroys relationships, but safety brings people closer to them.

www.selfinjury.com

Family Equality

Family Equality's mission is to advance legal and lived equality for LGBTQ families, and for those who wish to form them, through building community, changing hearts and minds, and driving policy change.

<https://www.familyequality.org/resources/talking-with-our-children-about-consent/>

Cyber Safety- Internet Safety

Everyone should know how to be safe when surfing the web, but internet safety tips and tricks are spread out all over the web without a go-to resource. Since the majority of internet scam and virus victims are students and young people, Open Colleges is a perfect place to post the very first full guide to being safe on the internet.

<https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/cyber-safety/>

Books You Can Read with Children

C is for Consent; Eleanor Morison (ages 1-5)

Let's Talk about Body Boundaries, Consent & Respect; Jayneen Sanders (age 4-10)

Your Body Belongs to You; Cornelia Maude Spelman (ages 3-6)

The Trouble with Secrets: Karen Johnsen (ages 3-8)

My Body Belongs to Me: Jill Starishevsky (ages 3-8)

A Secret Safe to Tell; Naomi Hunter (ages 3-8)

I Said No! A Kid-to-kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private; Zack & Kimberly King (ages 5-11)

Consent (for Kids): Boundaries, Respect, and Being In Charge of You; Rachel Brian (ages 6-10)

The Swimsuit Lesson: Jon Holsten (ages 6-12)

Books For Adults

Body Safety Education: A parents' guide to protecting kids from sexual abuse:
Jayneen Sanders (ages 3-12)

Teaching Kids About Boundaries

 childmind.org/article/teaching-kids-boundaries-empathy

Why empathy and self-awareness play a major role

Rae Jacobson

For most parents setting boundaries for young kids' behavior is second nature: No hitting. Don't interrupt. We don't grab toys out of other kids' hands.

But as they get older, and social interaction gets more complex, it's not enough to just learn the rules. They need to learn to set boundaries for themselves and respect those of others. And that takes being able to recognize what others want and need — and express what they want and need, too.

“Boundaries are essentially about understanding and respecting our own needs, and being respectful and understanding of the needs of others,” explains Stephanie Dowd, PsyD, a *clinical psychologist*,

“and for that to work, we need to be putting a big emphasis on helping kids develop greater empathy and self-awareness.”

Why is empathy important?

For some parents, the idea of teaching children who haven't quite mastered the art of tying their shoes to be more empathetic might seem a little absurd. But you can help them slowly build an awareness of others. Kids may not grasp the subtleties of what it means to be empathetic, but they don't need to.

“You're not going to sit down with a 4-year-old and say, okay, this is what empathy means,” says Rachel Busman, PsyD, a clinical psychologist. “What we want is for kids to start developing that awareness of how others are feeling, and begin using it as a kind of guide for how to behave.”

And at the same time, we want to help kids get comfortable with articulating their own feelings and setting limits, even as they respect others' limits. That takes practice.

How to help kids develop empathy

“Empathy is something we think of as being very adult,” says Mandi Silverman, PsyD, a clinical psychologist. “But in reality, by age 3 most kids will instinctually show concern for a crying friend, or realize when someone has a “booboo” and want to give it a band-aid.”

Younger kids often learn best by experience, she explains, so parents should start by addressing problem behaviors when they happen. “Social skills coaching is always best when you can do it in real time,” she says, “They’re more likely to remember what to do in that situation and be able to replicate the behavior next time it comes up.”

Luckily (or not), most kids offer ample opportunities to practice intervening in the moment. For example, “How do you think Mark felt when you took his toy away?”

If your child grabs a reluctant friend, you could encourage him to think about how his friend might be feeling, and why asking before touching is important. “It’s important to ask before touching someone else, because that person might not be feeling well, or they could be in a bad mood and not want to play just then.”

Sometimes kids’ egotism can be a helpful tool, says Dr. Busman. “Ask your child to think about how he feels when his sister won’t let him play with her friends, or won’t share her dessert. Then ask how he thinks she’d feel if he did the same.”

Using your child’s feelings as a mirror for others can help create perspective — and give him a chance to link actions to the feelings they cause.

Rules work both ways

One way to help kids understand why it’s important to follow rules is to see them as reciprocal.

- People are in charge of their own bodies, and it’s not okay to touch them if they don’t want you to, just like it’s not okay for someone to touch you in a way you don’t like.
- Sometimes things that seem fun to you are not fun for the other person. “A kid might want to jump on his friend’s back because that sounds fun,” suggests Dr. Busman, “but if he doesn’t take time to ask if the friend is okay with that, and doesn’t make sure he’s ready, someone is likely to end up getting hurt.” And that person could be you, too.
- Listening when people are talking, especially when they’re giving instructions or asking us to do something, or not do something, is how we stay safe and make sure other people are safe, too. If people aren’t listening to you, they won’t know what you need or want, either.

Practice setting boundaries

Learning how to be more empathetic can be a big help for kids when it comes to social interactions, but it's equally important to help your child learn to advocate for himself and his boundaries when other kids are being pushy, aggressive or just thoughtless.

Helping your child make a plan for what to do when someone isn't respecting his feelings or boundaries will give your child the chance to practice standing up for himself.

For example, you could ask, "What are some ways you could let Jeremy know you don't like it when he hugs you without asking?" Go over some simple phrases your child can use to advocate for himself: "Please stop." "I don't like that." "It's my turn now."

Make a list of Get-A-Grown-Up scenarios. Examples could include:

- Hitting, or pushing, or even a kid who's just playing too rough
- A child who won't take no for an answer
- A situation where he feels unsafe or uncomfortable. For example if his friends want to climb a fence into someone else's yard or are playing too close to the pool

Helping kids get comfortable advocating for their boundaries early will help them do so in the future when the stakes can be much higher.

Model behavior

When it comes to learning anything, kids look to their parents for cues on how to behave, and empathy and self-awareness are no exception. If you want instructions to stick, it's important to practice what you preach.

"We want parents to be demonstrating the kind of behaviors they want their kids to emulate," says Dr. Busman. "You may be speaking to your partner, or a friend, but that doesn't mean your child isn't paying attention and picking up signals on how to think, how to act, and how to interact with others."

When kids hear parents checking with each other to see if they're on the same page before they make decisions, or asking a friend how they feel — and really listening to the answer — kids are more likely to follow suit.

Find, and discuss, examples

Another way to make empathy part of the conversation is to draw on kids' favorite media, pointing out examples of good or bad behavior. For example, if a character on TV is being bullied, try asking: "How do you think he felt when the other kids called

him stupid? Is it ever okay to call someone something like that?"

Niki Kriese and her husband Mat started doing this early on with their two sons, Simon (4) and Felix (6). Niki says her family often relies on examples from books, movies, or TV to help get a conversation going. "The other night Mat was reading an old Berenstain Bears book to the kids," she says. In the book, the bear family was trying to decide how to spend the day together.

Halfway through, Mat stopped and asked the kids, "Hey, has the mother said one word so far?" The boys agreed that she hadn't. When they'd finished reading, he noted that at no point in the story had anyone asked the mother bear what she'd like to do, or if she was having fun.

"Do you think *your* mom would like that?" he queried Simon and Felix.

The boys shook their heads.

"Would you?" Again, the answer was no.

The object, Niki explains, isn't necessarily to start a deep discussion, but rather to help her sons develop curiosity about how others are thinking and feeling. "Obviously they're not processing it in the same way we do," she says, "but the hope is that we're setting them up to think critically and empathetically as they get older."

Embrace diversity

Another key part of instilling empathy is making sure kids are interacting with people who are different than themselves on a regular basis. "It can be hard for kids to make the jump from how *they* feel when something happens, to how someone else might feel about the same thing," says Dr. Busman. "And sometimes that's especially hard when the other person looks or behaves differently than they do."

One thing that encourages acceptance of differences is activities that give your child the opportunity to play with kids from different backgrounds, races and physical abilities who share common interests.

It also helps to demystify kids of other genders as early as possible. "What we don't want is for kids to hit puberty and still be viewing the opposite sex as an alien species," says Dr. Dowd. Parents can help by making sure activities provide ample opportunity for girls and boys to play together and collaborate on an even playing field.

Respect limits on offering affection

Kids should be allowed to decide for themselves if, and when, they want to show affection. “Grandma may be expecting a big hug when she comes over, but we want kids to understand that things like hugs and kisses, whether they’re getting or giving them, should be a choice,” says Dr. Busman.

Parents should avoid pushing kids to be affectionate when they’re not comfortable. But forgoing grandparental smooches doesn’t have to mean being impolite. “Come up with something else your child can do instead,” suggests Dr. Busman. For example, instead of a kiss on the cheek, she could pick something she’s more comfortable with, like waving or shaking hands.

Take your kids’ limits seriously

Really listen when your child tells you what is, and isn’t, okay with them, and take their requests to heart whenever possible. It sounds like a no-brainer, but Dr. Busman explains that dismissing children’s boundaries is often something grown-ups do all the time without even realizing it.

“If a child says she hates being tickled, or picked up, don’t say, ‘Oh come on, you don’t really hate it.’ Instead say, ‘I hear you and I won’t do it again.’”

How to Help Kids Deal With Cyberbullying

 childmind.org/article/help-kids-deal-cyberbullying

Empowering them with information and strategies to protect themselves

Shared in partnership with [Common Sense Media](#)

Cyberbullying is the use of digital-communication tools (such as the [Internet and cell phones](#)) to make another person feel angry, sad, or scared, usually again and again. Examples of cyberbullying include sending hurtful texts or instant messages, posting embarrassing photos or video on social media, and spreading mean rumors online or with cell phones.

If you're trying to figure out whether your [kid is being cyberbullied](#), think about whether the offender is being hurtful *intentionally* and *repeatedly*. If the answer is no, the offender might simply need to learn better online behavior. If the answer is yes, take it seriously.

What should I do if my kid is bullied online?

Finding out that your kid has been cyberbullied is emotional for parents. You or your kid might want to retaliate, but it's best to help your kid defuse the situation, protect himself, and make rational efforts to put a stop to the bullying. Here are the immediate steps we recommend for parents:

- Reassure your child that you love and support him or her.
- Help your child step away from the computer or device and take a break.
- If you can identify the bully, consider talking with the parents.
- Consider contacting your kid's school. If bullying is happening online, it might be happening offline, too.
- Empower your kid with specific steps he or she can take.

When should parents intervene in a cyberbullying situation?

Many kids don't tell their parents that they're being cyberbullied. Kids might feel embarrassed or ashamed to let you know they've been targeted. They also might be afraid your involvement will make things worse. But, if you find out your kid has been cyberbullied, it probably means the issue is major enough for you to get involved.

Try this: Collect more facts by talking the situation through with your kid. Work out a plan of action together. Make sure you and your kid agree on what the outcome should be. Ramp up your efforts as the situation demands.

Another reason not to rush to a solution: Research indicates that peers sticking up for each other is a very effective defense against bullies. Bullies work by trying to isolate their victims. When kids rally around the target, it thwarts the bully. Encourage your kid to reach out to friends for support.

Of course, if there are any real threats to your child's safety, you should contact the authorities immediately.

What can I tell my kid to do if he or she is being cyberbullied?

Kids may not always recognize teasing as bullying. Some kids also may be too embarrassed or ashamed to talk to their parents about it. That's why it's important to talk about online and digital behavior before your child starts interacting with others online and with devices. To prepare your kid for going online or getting a cell phone, or, if you know he or she has been bullied online, offer these steps he or she can take immediately:

- **Sign off the computer.** Ignore the attacks and walk away from the cyberbully.
- **Don't respond or retaliate.** If you're angry or hurt, you might say things you'll regret later. Cyberbullies often want to get a reaction out of you, so don't let them know their plans have worked.
- **Block the bully.** If you get mean messages through IM or a social-networking site, take the person off your buddy or friends list. You also can delete messages from bullies without reading them.
- **Save and print out bullying messages.** If the harassment continues, save the evidence. This could be important proof to show parents or teachers if the bullying doesn't stop.
- **Talk to a friend.** When someone makes you feel bad, sometimes it can help to talk the situation over with a friend.
- **Tell a trusted adult.** A trusted adult is someone you believe will listen and who has the skills, desire, and authority to help you. Telling an adult isn't tattling — it's standing up for yourself. And, even if the bullying occurs online, your school probably has rules against it.

How do I report cyberbullying?

Social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat have gotten serious about helping users who have been targeted by bullies.

If **your kid is bullied on a website or in an app**, go to the company's site and look for a section offering support, such as "Community Guidelines," "Safety Center," "Parent Info," "Safety Tips," or something similar. It may make recommendations such as blocking the bully or changing the setting for who can contact you.

If **your kid is bullied or harassed over text message**, call your mobile phone provider to report the number. You may be able to block it or change your phone number. Many carriers offer additional anti-bullying features for a fee.

If **the abuse continues**, you may need to **enlist the help of your community**: your kid's school, his or her coaches, or other parents. If **the communication contains threats**, you'll need to report it to law enforcement.

Empower kids to take positive action

Until recently, parents, teachers, and news accounts have focused on the relationship between a bully and his or her target. But experts say that there are usually more kids involved in a cyberbullying scenario, making it a much more complex organism than previously thought. In fact, one of the side effects of how public bullying has become is that potentially everyone in the bully's circle of friends — both online and off-line — may be involved.

Identifying the different roles in a cyberbullying situation can help you to help your kid develop self-awareness and a sense of empathy. These skills will go a long way toward cultivating an online culture of respect and responsibility.

First, there's the **cyberbully**, the aggressor who's using digital media tools (such as the Internet and cell phone) to deliberately upset or harass their **target** — the person who's being cyberbullied. Then there are the **bystanders**, the kids who are aware that something cruel is going on but who stay on the sidelines (either out of indifference or because they're afraid of being socially isolated or of becoming a target themselves). But there are also kids who act as **upstanders**. These are the kids who actively try to break the cycle, whether by sticking up for the target, addressing the bully directly, or notifying the appropriate authorities about what's going on.

Kids may play different roles at different times. Your advice to your child will differ depending on the situation and the specific role your child is playing in whatever bullying or drama is going on.

By making kids aware that a safe world is everyone's responsibility, we empower them to take positive actions — like reporting a bully, flagging a cruel online comment, or not forwarding a humiliating photo — that ultimately can put a stop to an escalating episode of cruelty.

For more information about safe use of digital media, go to commonsensemedia.org.

10 Ways to Teach Children to Speak Up About Sexual Abuse

childmind.org/article/10-ways-to-teach-your-child-the-skills-to-prevent-sexual-abuse

Straight talk about body parts and a no-secrets policy can empower kids to get help when they need it

Natasha Daniels

We teach our young children all sorts of ways to keep themselves safe. We teach them to watch the hot stove, we teach them to look both ways before they cross the street. But, more often than not, body safety is not taught until much older — until sometimes, it is too late. Research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that approximately 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 4 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18. You want to hear something even scarier? According to the US Department of Justice (nsopw.org) only 10% of perpetrators were strangers to the child and 23% of the perpetrators were *children* themselves!

These statistics do not surprise me. In my practice I meet children on a weekly basis who have been victims of sexual abuse. Many of them are under five years old. Almost all of them knew their perpetrator and more often than not, it is another kid!

Parents will frequently tell me that they didn't think this could happen to them. That they never leave their children with strangers. That they always keep their children within their eyesight.

Do your children go on play dates? Do they go to daycare or pre-school? Do you have friends or family over to your house? Do they play at the neighbor's house? The fact is, you cannot fully prevent the risk of your child being sexually abused.

The children I have worked with have come from good neighborhoods, and good homes, and go to really good schools. I have worked with children who have been sexually abused on play dates, sleepovers, in the classroom, on the playground, on the school bus, in their playroom and out in their backyard.

Now that I have officially scared you to death, let's walk you back down from that cliff. We have to allow our children to go out into the world and interact with those around them. But we can arm them with knowledge that might save them from being victimized.

Parents do not always talk to their children about body safety early enough. They think kids are too young. It is too scary. But it is never too soon, and it doesn't have to be a scary conversation. Here are things 10 things that could help your child be less vulnerable to sexual abuse:

1. Talk about body parts early

Name body parts and talk about them very early. Use proper names for body parts, or at least teach your child what the actual words are for their body parts. I can't tell you how many young children I have worked with who have called their vagina their "bottom." Feeling comfortable using these words and knowing what they mean can help a child talk clearly if something inappropriate has happened.

2. Teach them that some body parts are private

Tell your child that their private parts are called private because they are not for everyone to see. Explain that mommy and daddy can see them naked, but people outside of the home should only see them with their clothes on. Explain how their doctor can see them without their clothes because mommy and daddy are there with them and the doctor is checking their body.

3. Teach your child body boundaries

Tell your child matter-of-factly that no one should touch their private parts and that no one should ask them to touch somebody else's private parts. Parents will often forget the second part of this sentence. Sexual abuse often begins with the perpetrator asking the child to touch them or someone else.

4. Tell your child that body secrets are not okay

Most perpetrators will tell the child to keep the abuse a secret. This can be done in a friendly way, such as, "I love playing with you, but if you tell anyone else what we played they won't let me come over again." Or it can be a threat: "This is our secret. If you tell anyone I will tell them it was your idea and you will get in big trouble!" Tell your kids that no matter what anyone tells them, body secrets are not okay and they should always tell you if someone tries to make them keep a body secret.

5. Tell your child that no one should take pictures of their private parts

This one is often missed by parents. There is a whole sick world out there of pedophiles who love to take and trade pictures of naked children online. This is an epidemic and it puts your child at risk. Tell your kids that no one should ever take

pictures of their private parts.

6. Teach your child how to get out of scary or uncomfortable situations

Some children are uncomfortable with telling people “no”— especially older peers or adults. Tell them that it’s okay to tell an adult they have to leave, if something that feels wrong is happening, and help give them words to get out of uncomfortable situations. Tell your child that if someone wants to see or touch private parts they can tell them that they need to leave to go potty.

7. Have a code word your children can use when they feel unsafe or want to be picked up

As children get a little bit older, you can give them a code word that they can use when they are feeling unsafe. This can be used at home, when there are guests in the house or when they are on a play date or a sleepover.

8. Tell your children they will never be in trouble if they tell you a body secret

Children often tell me that they didn’t say anything because they thought they would get in trouble, too. This fear is often used by the perpetrator. Tell your child that no matter what happens, when they tell you anything about body safety or body secrets they will NEVER get in trouble.

9. Tell your child that a body touch might tickle or feel good

Many parents and books talk about “good touch and bad touch,” but this can be confusing because often these touches do not hurt or feel bad. I prefer the term “secret touch,” as it is a more accurate depiction of what might happen.

10. Tell your child that these rules apply even with people they know and even with another child

This is an important point to discuss with your child. When you ask a young child what a “bad guy” looks like they will most likely describe a cartoonish villain. You can say something like, “Mommy and daddy might touch your private parts when we are cleaning you or if you need cream — but no one else should touch you there. Not friends, not aunts or uncles, not teachers or coaches. Even if you like them or think they are in charge, they should still not touch your private parts.”

I am not naïve enough to believe that these discussions will absolutely prevent sexual abuse, but knowledge is a powerful deterrent, especially with young children who are targeted due to their innocence and ignorance in this area.

And one discussion is not enough. Find natural times to reiterate these messages, such as bath time or when they are running around naked. And please share this article with those you love and care about and help me spread the message of body safety!

This article first appeared on Natasha Daniels' website, Anxious Toddlers.